



Henderson County Department of Public Health

Steven E. Smith, MPA, Health Director | Diana Curran, MD, Medical Director

1200 Spartanburg Highway, Suite 100, Hendersonville, NC 28792

Main Phone: (828) 692-4223 | Administration FAX: (828) 697-4709

Clinic FAX: (828) 697-4691 | Communicable Disease FAX: (828) 697-4504

Questions/ Comments about COVID-19

April 8- April 15, 2020

The following are questions and comments received from members of the media and general public:

Public Health's answers are in Blue

Emergency Management's answers are in Purple

Question: What is the number of people tested in Henderson County to date?

A: To date, of the testing reported to the health department, approximately 500 tests have been completed. That number does not capture out-of-county tests and some of the tests by independent providers.

Question: What is the current number of positive cases in Henderson County?

A: The number of laboratory confirmed cases, as of April 14, 2020 is 99.

Question: What is the % of positives for tests completed?

A: We will start reporting this % when we have a better model for capturing all testing.

Question: What is the number of Henderson County residents that have been hospitalized with Covid-19 here and elsewhere?

A: NC DHHS does report this number for the state as a whole. That number cannot be reported for a jurisdiction as small as Henderson County since it is often a single individual or less than 10 individuals. Reporting any metric with extremely low counts could lead to the identification of the individual and protected healthcare information. That position has been discussed with the County Attorney and the UNC School of Government.

Question: How many ventilators do we have in Henderson county?

A: Total ventilators in Henderson County are 31.

Question: Have clusters of Covid-19 infections been sought and identified in the County? If so, how many and where are they located?

A: Our only clusters or outbreaks today are associated with congregate living facilities. 82 of the current 99 cases are associated with those settings. Of those 82 cases, 70 are residents and 12 are staff. Beyond the initial public information releases of outbreaks, future reports of aggregate cases and deaths will be linked with congregate living facilities as a general category when appropriate, but we won't delineate these by facility or location. That position has been discussed with the County Attorney and the UNC School of Government.

Question: Can Henderson County share the number of Covid19 cases that have recovered?

A: We anticipate beginning a process to identify and capture "recoveries". Our immediate priorities have limited the time available for this type of information gathering. This is an intensive effort that often requires multiple phone calls to an individual that may or may not be completely recovered yet. There is a difficult balance here between

desired information and intrusion into personal lives. We may not be able to sustain this information gathering as the number of cases increase.

The State Epidemiologist has referenced the subjectivity of this type of data and potential problems with representing self-described health status.

Additionally, many of the current 99 cases are not yet at a recovery point since many were recently identified. Current cases today are primarily linked to long term care facilities (82 of 99) so recovery numbers may be skewed within this population.

Question/Comments: Are people in our community complying with the “Stay at Home” orders? It seems like there are a lot of people on the roads and in stores.

A: While there are both State and Local “stay at home” orders, there are exceptions for the public to travel to and from work, if appropriate. There are also provisions for the public to travel for personal needs or to care for a member of their family. We ask the public to partner with our community on these initiatives.

We appreciate any reports of trouble spots and will continue to visit those based on concerns. The NC Governor’s recent Executive Order 131 clarified the number of people that could be inside a business at a given point in time, this should help. Most people are trying to be compliant.

Question: How are you monitoring compliance with the mask and 6’ rule, especially in grocery stores?

A: Public Health is monitoring the social distancing guidelines on a complaint basis, and we are also making some random visits to various types of businesses and stores.

Face masks are an option for the general public and these may limit the potential spread of coronavirus. They are not required in public settings.

Question: Why are so many non-essential businesses still open?

A: Essential business are defined by the NC Department of Revenue and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). Many are also reflected in the County’s Amended State of Emergency. During these challenging times many firms have adjusted their business model to meet other needs in our community, state and nation. Without knowing the specifics of each business, it is hard to make a determination for each instance. We would encourage anyone having questions to refer to our State of Emergency, Governor Cooper’s executive orders or The DOR’s website for guidance.

Comment: Concern from an employee that their workplace didn’t seem “essential”, and they felt at risk.

A: The list of essential businesses is mirrored after the State’s list. It is important for each community to be able to make any additions. It is important to remember that individual businesses can modify their model of service delivery. Many have adjusted to by appointment only or “call ahead” for service. During trying times people can adjust and adapt to the needs. We would encourage essential businesses to work with their staff to find a way to deliver a model of service which meets everyone’s needs.

Question: Is there currently a curfew for Henderson County?

A: There is no curfew in effect for Henderson County. We ask the public to be responsible in their travels for essential business.

Question: Will the stay at home order be extended?

Public Health: There’s really no way to predict if it’ll need to be extended.

EM: This is something that will continue to be evaluated by the State and local governments. It is important to note that the public’s commitment to these orders is what will make them successful.

Question: If 4 people get together to say hi, outside, staying 10 feet apart at all times. While that may be safe, is it allowed under the Governor's Stay at Home order?

A: Yes, this would be allowed. Gathering of no more than 10 people and maintaining social distancing.

Question: Can the police enforce social distancing?

A: It won't be possible or practical for public health or law enforcement to enforce every instance where less than ideal circumstances exist. We would recommend use of face coverings for residents if available. Many volunteer groups are making these.

We have to have the community's support. As a friend and neighbor we should be willing to have those conversations with those who we perceive are not being responsible. It would be impossible for Law Enforcement to intervene in every instance of perceived non-compliance.

Question: Is there any way we can keep people from traveling here from places where precautions are not taken as seriously (South Carolina and Florida) during the pandemic?

A: The last supplemental proclamation from the Commissioners added additional restrictions to travel.

Question: Were you able to trace the source of the infections at Cherry Springs? Are the infected staff having their families with whom they live tested?

A: There has not been any determination of the source of transmission for the cases at this facility and there may have been more than one. With asymptomatic transmission, we may never know in any definitive way. All close contacts have been identified and provided guidance about necessary quarantine, isolation and testing.

Question: A concerned family member asked about how to get information about a loved one at a particular facility.

A: If you are unable to obtain information on your family member, please call our Communicable Disease Nurse at (828) 694-6019 and we will see if we can assist.

Question(s) about the numbers of cases in long term care facilities and the county's total numbers compared to other counties:

A: We are identifying more cases because facilities are actively reporting any concerns about symptomatic staff or residents and we have been accomplishing aggressive contact tracing and testing for this high-risk population. We (public health, hospitals and community health center) have focused and prioritized our early efforts on those with high risk conditions and specifically those in long term care facilities. Our collective approach also allowed us to do expanded testing in these facilities which identified this relatively large number of cases at an early stage. Those aggressive efforts have aided in limiting transmission to others and protecting lives.

Question: I would like to know if Coronavirus Antibody testing is available here? Will it be available to general public? Where can I get it if I believe I may have had the virus but want to make sure?

A: It is not available at this time. Public health and our healthcare partners are exploring these options for the future and they will likely be linked to a regional or statewide study effort.

Question: When can I be tested?

A: You should consult with your physician about your specific health condition and concerns. We do not recommend testing unless you are experiencing something beyond mild symptoms.

Question: Can you tell me why Henderson county has such a high death rate compared to other counties. It appears from the numbers you provide the death rate would be around 4%.

A: The current death rate is disproportionately higher than rates for general populations because the majority of cases today are linked to long term care facilities. We won't know what a population level rate will be until we dramatically expand testing to more individuals and age groups.

Question: Am I at risk if I live near a facility that is experiencing an outbreak?

A: You are not at any greater risk for acquiring COVID-19 just because you live in proximity to the facility. We continue to assume there are many cases in Henderson County today, most of them unidentified in part because of being asymptomatic or only having mild symptoms. Our guidance to everyone is the same regardless of where you live...stay at home and physically distance yourself from others as much as possible and only leave for essential tasks.

Question: Are there other local hot spots besides Cherry Spring Village, and if so where?

A: Our only "hot spots" are associated with long term care facilities. As stated above, we want everyone to continue to take the same precautions regardless of where you live in the county. The potential to be exposed to COVID-19 in Henderson County is not limited to any geographic region given community spread.

Question(s): Can the community help by making masks?

A: Many local organizations and individuals have agreed to make and donate masks for healthcare workers. We have been able to connect these donations with agencies in need. Recently we have seen improvements in the commercial and emergency relief supply chain for healthcare masks. Many individuals may find a homemade face covering useful for personal protection, if groups have masks available for donation you can contact the Emergency Operations Center at 697-4728 to be connected with an organization in need. Many community non-profits are interested in receiving donated masks.